

VZCZCXRO5179
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHDS #2525/01 2591313
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 161313Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2482
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002525

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

AF FOR A/S JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ER](#) [SO](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DAS YAMAMOTO DISCUSSES REGIONAL ISSUES
AND INTERNAL POLITICS WITH PM MELES

Classified By: CHARGE JANET WILGUS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told visiting AF DAS Yamamoto Sept. 12 that his ruling coalition was developing a new strategy to deal with Eritrea's "proxy war" with Ethiopia in Somalia. He also suggested that the Government of Sudan was reluctant to allow a transition to a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur because it did not want to "freeze" the status quo there. Meles said that his recent trip to Libya did not involve negotiations with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Mogadishu, but was rather focused on defusing pressure to join President Qaddafi's Sept 9th organization. DAS Yamamoto asked about the health conditions of detained opposition leaders from the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD); the PM responded that none was in grave condition and all were receiving adequate medical treatment. Meles also renewed complaints about pending U.S. congressional legislation on Ethiopia. END SUMMARY

12. (U) AF DAS Don Yamamoto called on PM Meles Sept. 12, accompanied by Charge Wilgus and Pol/Econ Counselor (notetaker). The PM was joined by his personal assistant, Gebretensai.

NORTH AFRICAN STATES' VIEWS OF SOMALIA

13. (C) PM Meles told DAS Yamamoto that he and Libyan leader Mohammad Gaddafi had not discussed Somalia during Meles' recent one-day visit to Tripoli, contradicting press reports. The real purpose of the trip had been for Meles to explain to Gaddafi Ethiopia's reluctance to join the Libyan leader's Association of Sahelian and Saharan States (CEN-SAD). In fact, Meles said, he had been reluctant to discuss with Gaddafi Somalia or Sudan, since Meles said he knew where the Libyan leader stood on those issues. The PM added that he had been particularly determined not to broach Ethiopia's internal political issues so as not to "whet Gaddafi's appetite." Meles added that the CIC was also appealing directly to Gaddafi, as was Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Abdullai Yusuf. The PM recalled what he termed Gaddafi's "visceral hatred" of Wahhabism and asked rhetorically why the Libyan leader would support the CIC. Meles then claimed that Eritrean President Isaias had been trying to convince Gaddafi that the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) was on its way to reestablishing a unified and functional state in Somalia and therefore deserved support.

14. (C) Meles went on to say that Egypt was feeling

marginalized by IGAD's role in Somalia, which Egypt still considered part of its sphere of influence. Egypt also had a longstanding strategy of "keeping Ethiopia busy," to which the CIC contributed. Sudan, on the other hand, had taken a measured approach to Somalia. It had not opposed IGAD efforts, even including the deployment of an IGASOM peacekeeping mission there. Meles said he didn't know what Sudanese leaders felt in their "heart of hearts", but had tried to express on CIC leaders the importance of accepting at least the Transitional Federal Charter. Meles noted that many CIC leaders had been trained in the "Turabi School" of Islamic politics and undoubtedly enjoyed some support among those circles in Khartoum. Meles called Yemen's position on Somalia "cautious, and helpful on the whole."

SUDANESE STRATEGY IN DARFUR

¶15. (C) After receiving an update on US views of Darfur from DAS Yamamoto, Meles shared his own perspective on GOS strategy in the area. The PM suggested that the GOS had recently decided to end its "proxy" approach to dealing with non-signatory rebel groups in Darfur and were now committed to taking direct military action against the rebels. The GOS had also determined that it must deal directly with Eritrean President Isaias' role in Darfur as well. Meles thought that the GOS would seek an end to Isaias' support for rebels in return for opening the Sudanese border with Eritrea. Finally, the GOS now intended to "work the JEM problem through Turabi." The reason for GOS reluctance to tolerate the blue-hatting of the current African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) was a fear that UN presence in Darfur would "freeze the status quo." Under these circumstances, Meles

ADDIS ABAB 00002525 002 OF 002

suggested to DAS Yamamoto that confrontation with the GOS might not be the right tactic.

A NEW GOE APPROACH TOWARD ERITREA

¶16. (C) The PM told Yamamoto that the EPRDF's upcoming annual conference would consider a "slightly modified" policy toward Eritrea. The leadership of the EPRDF had already agreed to the new strategy, which essentially declared Ethiopian peacemaking efforts to date unsuccessful. Under its previous approach, the ruling party had hoped that if it deterred a direct attack by Eritrea, then it would open a door to dialogue with Asmara. In fact, however, Eritrea had simply chosen to pursue a proxy war against Ethiopia. Meles suggested that Isaias had been persuaded by his experience in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan that supporting the enemies of his neighbors could help him achieve his goals. In addition, Isaias appeared to believe that Ethiopia's post-election problems would make it vulnerable to such tactics. Meles claimed that the GOE had until recently pursued any contact that it believed could effectively communicate with the Eritrean leadership, but said that his own party had now labeled such efforts "a waste of time."

¶17. (C) Meles indicated that the EPRDF's new approach would not be to respond in kind to Eritrea's tactics, but rather to "address the vulnerabilities" that Eritrea was seeking to exploit. He assured DAS Yamamoto that Ethiopia was not going back on "the fundamentals of the peace package," but said that the GOE's new focus would be to protect against Eritrean-backed disturbances.

CUD TRIAL TO FINISH BY YEAR END

¶18. (C) DAS Yamamoto inquired about the health of imprisoned CUD leaders, including Hailu Shawel and Mesfin Woldemariam.

Meles replied that the two were not in grave condition and receive medical care when they need it. In fact, he added, they received "better medical care than 95 percent of population." Yamamoto asked the CUD trial would likely conclude; Meles said he hoped it would finish before the end of the year. The DAS asked to see the detainees, but the PM indicated that he saw nothing to gain by providing further access to them.

COMMENT: NEW POLICY ON ERITREA UNCLEAR

19. (C) Meles' suggestion that Ethiopia is revising its policy toward Eritrea is potentially very significant, but it remains unclear precisely what the new policy means. Post will seek to gain a better understanding of where the GOE is headed in this area.
WILGUS